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ABSTRACT

This study polled newly-employed rehabilitation counselors in an attempt to measure their attitudes concerning job satisfaction. It was hypothesized that job satisfaction of the counselor is related to: (1) the policies, practices, and working conditions of the employing agency (State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies); (2) the professional standards and practices of his work; and (3) his ability to engage in a self-satisfying occupation. A twenty-five item questionnaire was designed and administered to 140 counselors to draw out these attitudes. Although this report is interim in nature, a model profile of a "typical" rehabilitation counselor who participated in the study has been developed. A list of comments made by counselors is included. The results of the study tend to indicate that a large percentage of rehabilitation counselors lack a strong commitment to stay in the rehabilitation field. (SJ)

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JOB SATISFACTION AMONG REHABILITATION COUNSELORS: AN INTERIM REPORT

REPRINT R T SERIES

NUMBER THREE

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prepared by

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PREFACE

The study described in this paper was conducted by John Kirchgessner with students at the Regional Counselor Training Program, Institute, West Virginia. As Mr. Kirchgessner explains, the study is interim or pilot in nature. However, the methodology and findings are considered useful and important enough for this Research and Training Center to publish Mr. Kirchgessner's write-up.

It is felt that others may wish to replicate this study and compare their findings with those reported here.

Additionally, while the paper does not include a section on "implications", there are obvious clues for recruitment, selection, training, management, promotions and retention of rehabilitation counselors.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to attempt to assess job satisfaction among newly employed vocational rehabilitation counselors. Job satisfaction of rehabilitation counselors would seem to be related to the retention of staff in State Rehabilitation Agencies. Everything else being equal, an individual who is pleased with his job will probably remain longer than one who is displeased. The holding power of a job seems to be related to how the incumbent views the job in question.

By studying rehabilitation counselors' attitudes toward their employing agencies, toward the professional standards they maintain, and toward themselves, it was hoped that criteria could be established to measure job satisfaction. In this study, it has been hypothesized that job satisfaction of a rehabilitation counselor is related to: 1) the policies, practices, and working conditions of the State Rehabilitation Agencies, 2) the professional aspects of his occupation (standards of practice and service), and 3) responsibilities to himself (being able to engage in a satisfying occupation).

This report is interim in nature. Additional statistical analyses of the data will be done. Factor analyses of the statements and correlation of scores are planned.

METHOD

A twenty-five item questionnaire (see Appendix) was used in this study. Six of the questionnaire items were adapted from those found in Marvin Sussman's Profile of the 1965 Student Rehabilitation Counselor. The other items developed from attitudes and viewpoints gleaned from classroom discussions and informal interactions with counselor-trainees. The trainees were participants in a Rehabilitation Services Administration Region III Counselor Work-Study Program at Institute, West Virginia

The questionnaire was administered to the counselor-trainees during the final (12th) week of their entry work-study experience. This was after work experiences in rehabilitation agencies and educational instruction in rehabilitation counseling had been completed.

SAMPLE

From October, 1967 until December, 1968, 140 counselors were surveyed with the questionnaire. These counselors, for the most part, were recently employed and, generally, had no formal counselor education other than the Work-study Program.

Summarizing the results of Table 1, it can be said that the "average" counselor-in-training was a 31 year-old male who held a Bachelor's Degree and who had been employed for almost eight months prior to being surveyed.

T A B L E 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNSELORS

(N=140)

	MEAN	RANGE
Months Employed When Surveyed	7 1/2	3-27
Education (Years)	16	16-19
Age (Years)	31	21-53
Sex	Male 115 (82%)	Female 25 (18%)

Follow-up in April, 1969, revealed that 120 or 86 percent have maintained their employment with Vocational Rehabilitation.

As indicated in Table 2, the counselor-trainees represented five of the eight Rehabilitation Agencies within Region III. North Carolina had the largest representation (40 percent) and Maryland had the smallest (11 percent). The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands were not represented when the survey was conducted.

T A B L E 2

DISTRIBUTION OF COUNSELORS BY STATE

(N=140)

	NUMBER	PERCENT
North Carolina	56	40%
West Virginia	28	20%
Virginia	23	16%
Kentucky	18	13%
Maryland	15	11%
District of Columbia	--	---
Puerto Rico	--	---
Virgin Islands	--	---

Inspection of Table 3 reveals that the counselors were employed in some 11 different work settings.

Field program counselors made up the largest segment (36 percent). Mental Retardation Facility Counselors and those employed with specialized caseloads of Deaf or Blind Clients had the lowest representation (1 percent).

T A B L E 3

DISTRIBUTION OF COUNSELORS BY WORK SETTING

(N=140)

	NUMBER	PERCENT
Field Program	51	36
Psychiatric	28	20
Correctional	12	9
Public Schools	13	9
Special Education	9	6
Trust Fund	8	6
Rehabilitation Center and/or Workshop	7	5
Medical Hospital	5	4
Alcoholic	3	2
Mental Retardation Facility	2	1
Deaf and Blind	2	1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 presents in summary form distribution of responses to the 25 items found in the questionnaire. Below is a discussion of those responses.

The characteristic practice of a state rehabilitation agency to expect counselors to close a specific number of cases as rehabilitated each year generally elicited negative responses. For example, 80 percent of those surveyed maintained administrators and supervisors place excessive pressure on the counselor to attain yearly quotas or production goals. Also 61 percent did not consider the quota system to be adequate criteria for determining counselor effectiveness. Likewise, 70 percent reported administrative pressures to close cases may negatively affect services to individual clients and to the overall Rehabilitation program for a client.

Despite the reportedly excessive emphasis on closures, the counselors apparently felt they should not give preference to "easy cases" just to obtain an annual number of rehabilitations. Sixty-nine percent reported this was an unacceptable practice and only 20 percent said it was acceptable. No strong consensus was apparent as to the Field Counselor rehabilitation 52 cases a year. Forty-three percent reported this was realistic; 27 percent were ambivalent; and 31 percent responded negatively to a production goal of 52 cases a year in "Status 26". This lack of consensus may be explained by the fact that 64 percent of those surveyed were not Field Counselors.

A frequent complaint of Rehabilitation Counselors that they, themselves, have too much paper work to contend with is supported in this study. Sixty-nine percent seemed to agree that paper work and form completion should be the responsibility of a clerical worker or a counselor aid. Fifty-seven

percent of the counselors responded that the Rehabilitation agency stresses the tangibles of rehabilitation (i.e. number rehabilitated, case processing, and case service monies) rather than the intangibles. Counseling, selective training, and meeting client needs were reported to be of less relative importance to the agency.

The overwhelming majority of those polled (82%) felt they were not paid adequately for the job they perform. However, 62 percent were willing to forego higher salaries if high salaries would cause a reduction of monies available to staff training and development. This attitude may suggest the presence of altruism among the counselors or a belief that the agency is getting a good return on the money it spends on staff educational development.

Two current agency practices were generally not supported by the survey group. Sixty-one percent reported disagreement with the policy of using case service monies for dental or optical services -- "the teeth and glasses cases". They felt it was not a justifiable expenditure regardless of the client's employment potential. And 66 percent rejected the idea of paying a client's training tuition when the client can pay for it himself.

An overall vote of confidence is seeminly given the agency by the counselors for being treated as a professional worker. Sixty-seven percent reported this attitude while only 20 percent felt they were being treated unprofessionally.

A substantial proportion (77%) of the counselors reported their caseloads were too large to serve as they professionally should.

Sixty-one percent of the group surveyed often found themselves in situations where they must compromise professional principles in order to serve their clients. A very small percentage (9%) said this was never the case in their job situation.

Counseling should be the primary function of the counselor. Seventy percent agreed with this statement, while on the other hand, 67 percent reported that they as counselors do little counseling. They saw themselves as coordinators of services and doing a little of everything. If this study is an adequate reflection of counselors' attitudes, a conflict of wishing to do one thing and in reality doing something else is present.

Confidence in the counseling process as to its effectiveness in bringing about positive behavior change was expressed; 70 percent indicated this view. However, this view is contrary to current research which indicates that, on the average, the counseling endeavor does not demonstrate its effectiveness in doing what it is supposed to do. (Berenson and Carkhuff, 1967, pg. 13)

There was no apparent consensus as to client job placement being a counselor's responsibility: 51 percent said it should be, 40 percent said it should not, and 9 percent were ambivalent. This bipolar view may have appeared because counselors do not

T A B L E 4

JOB SATISFACTION AMONG REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

(N=140)

	STATEMENT OF ATTITUDE	STRONG AGREEMENT	AGREEMENT	AMBIVALENCE	DISAGREEMENT	STRONG DISAGREEMENT
1	The Rehabilitation Agency puts too much pressure on the Counselor for closures.	50%	30%	10%	9%	1%
2	The quota system is a realistic way to evaluate a counselor's performance and effectiveness.	1%	31%	6%	39%	23%
3	Closure quotas negatively affect client Rehabilitation Services and plans.	27%	43%	9%	17%	4%
4	It is acceptable to give preference to easy cases that have quick closure potential.	4%	16%	11%	39%	30%
5	Closing fifty-two (52) cases a year in status 26 is a realistic goal for a field counselor.	9%	33%	27%	18%	13%
6	Paper work and form completion should be the responsibility of a clerical worker or counselor aid.	27%	42%	6%	21%	4%
7	The Agency stresses the tangibles of rehabilitation (Number rehabilitated, Case movement, Case service monies, etc.) and gives lip-service to the intangibles (Client needs, Selective placement, Counseling, etc.).	16%	41%	9%	23%	6%
8	Salaries of Rehabilitation counselors are adequate.	1%	6%	11%	16%	66%
9	Money spent by the agency on staff training could be put to better use by raising salaries.	3%	18%	10%	38%	31%
10	Purchasing dental or optical services for a person, who may or may not have an employment handicap, is a justifiable expenditure for the agency.	8%	19%	12%	28%	33%
11	Providing a client training tuition, when he is able to pay it himself, is a poor agency policy.	34%	32%	6%	19%	9%
12	The Rehabilitation Agency treats its employees as professional workers	30%	46%	4%	13%	7%

T A B L E 4 (Continued)

	STATEMENT OF ATTITUDE	STRONG AGREEMENT	AGREEMENT	AMBIVALENCE	DISAGREEMENT	STRONG DISAGREEMENT
13	The counselor's case load is too large to serve as he professionally should.	53%	24%	14%	8%	1%
14	The counselor must often compromise his principles' to serve his clients.	43%	18%	13%	17%	9%
15	The Rehabilitation Counselor does little counseling. He is a coordinator of services and does a little of everything.	24%	43%	6%	23%	4%
16	Counseling should be the primary function the counselor performs.	32%	38%	10%	11%	9%
17	The counseling endeavor, on the average, is effective in bringing about positive behavior change in clients.	20%	50%	10%	16%	4%
18	Finding employment for a client should be a counselor's responsibility.	9%	42%	9%	34%	6%
19	The counselor is pretty much his own boss in planning his work.	31%	63%	3%	3%	0%
20	Being a Rehabilitation Counselor is intellectually stimulating.	43%	40%	9%	5%	3%
21	Even though the Counselor is employed as a bureaucratic functionary, he is a highly rated professional.	15%	28%	19%	19%	19%
22	In order to consider himself a truly professional person the counselor should have a master's degree.	11%	25%	12%	26%	26%
23	Rehabilitation counselor education prepares the employee to function more effectively within the State Agency.	37%	51%	6%	5%	1%
24	I would encourage a son or daughter of mine to enter the Rehabilitation field.	21%	36%	34%	4%	5%
25	Once a person has become a Rehabilitation employee he is apt to remain with the agency as a career employee.	5%	13%	31%	29%	22%

automatically assume they, themselves, will locate employment for clients. The client's ability to find his own job would preclude job placement activities by the counselors.

An extremely high percentage (94%) of the counselors indicated a large degree of independence in planning their work; and 83 percent expressed the attitude that their work was intellectually stimulating. Both of these responses would seem to be indications of job satisfaction.

As a whole the counselors in this study were not certain how highly rated their profession was. Forty-three percent of the group held the belief that being a government employee does not preclude being rated highly as a professional, while 38 percent said that it did. Nineteen percent were undecided about their rating as a professional worker.

When presented with the statement that a professional counselor should have a master's degree, the praticipants responded as follows: 52 percent disagreed, 12 percent were ambivalent; and 36 percent agreed. This may suggest an understanding that degrees alone do not make a counselor professional, but it also may indicate the view that a master's degree is not essential to practice as a rehabilitation counselor. In any event, the view seemed to suggest reluctance by a sizeable group to accept the notion of a master's degree as a part of professionalism.

Since all of the counselors participated in a twelve-week academic work-study program in Rehabilitation Counseling,

they were asked if they felt Rehabilitation Counseling training prepared one to function more effectively within the State Agency. A very high percent (88%) reported it does. Apparently, a large majority of these counselors feel Rehabilitation Counselor education is worthwhile and practical.

Of these surveyed, 57 percent indicated they would encourage a son or daughter to enter the rehabilitation field and 34 percent neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. As to remaining with the agency as career employees, 51 percent did not view themselves as long-term personnel, and 31 percent were uncertain in their commitment to remain with the agency. These results would tend to indicate that a large percentage of rehabilitation counselors lack a strong commitment to stay in the rehabilitation field.

SUMMARY

This study polled newly-employed rehabilitation counselors and an attempt was made to measure their attitudes concerning job satisfaction. It was hypothesized that job satisfaction of the counselor is related to: 1) The policies, practices, and working conditions of the employing agency (State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies); 2) the professional standards and practices of his work; and 3) his ability to engage in a self-satisfying occupation. A twenty-five item questionnaire was designed and administered to 140 counselors to try to draw out these attitudes.

Although this report is interim in nature, a modal profile of a "typical" rehabilitation counselor who participated in the study has been developed. The following statements are representative average attitudes of this "typical" rehabilitation counselor:

1) My caseload is too large (Item 15).
2) My salary is inadequate (Item 10).
3) My work is intellectually stimulating (Item 23).
4) The pressures for closures are excessive (Item 1).
5) I am pretty much my own boss in planning my work activities (Item 22).
6) My administrative responsibilities are so great I must decrease the time I spend with clients (Items 5, 18, and 3).
7) The quality of my client services is being sacrificed for expediency (Items 16, 1, 4, and 5).
8) I would encourage my son or daughter to enter the rehabilitation field (Item 14).
9) I do not care to be evaluated by my supervisor on the basis of my efficiency as a "closer of cases" (Items 2, 8, and 1).
10) I do not wish to remain in the rehabilitation field as a career employee (Item 13).
11) Obtaining a master's degree is not necessary for me to consider myself as a professional person (Item 24).

12) The agency treats me in a professional manner (Item 12).

13) Counselor education is worthwhile and practical (Item 25).

14) Counseling should be my main function, but I do little of it (Item 17 and 18).

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Test #_____

Sex _____

APPENDIX

ATTITUDE SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: Choose any of the numbered choices from the five point scale which represents your feelings about each of the statements listed below the scale. Write the number chosen for each statement in the space provided to the left of the statement.

I feel I

1) Agree completely with the statement.

2) Agree, but I would qualify my responses.

3) Neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

4) Disagree, but I would qualify my response.

5) Disagree completely with the statement.

1) ____ The Rehabilitation agency puts too much pressure on the counselor for closures.

2) ____ The quota system is a realistic way to evaluate a counselor's performance and effectiveness.

3) ____ Paper work and form completion should be the responsibility of a clerical worker or counselor aid.

4) ____ Closure quotas negatively affect client rehabilitation services and plans.

5) ____ The agency stresses the tangibles of rehabilitation (number rehabilitated, case movement, case service monies, etc.) and gives lip-service to the intangibles (client needs, selective placement, counseling, etc.).

6) ____ Purchasing dental or optical services for a person, who may or may not have an employment handicap, is a justifiable expenditure for the agency.

7) ____ Providing a client training tuition, when he is able to pay it himself, is a poor agency policy.

8) ____ It is acceptable to give preference to 'easy cases' that have quick closure potential.

9) ____ Money spent by the agency on staff training could be put to better use by raising salaries.

10) ____ Salaries of Rehabilitation Counselors are adequate.

11) ____ Closing fifty-two (52) cases a year in Status 26 is a realistic goal for a field counselor.

12) ____ The Rehabilitation agency treats its employees as professional workers.

13) ____ Once a person has become a Rehabilitation employee, he is apt to remain with the agency as a career employee.

14) ____ I would encourage a son ordaughter of mine to enter the rehabilitation field.

15) ____ The counselor's caseload is too large to serve as he professionally should.

16) ____ The counselor must often 'compromise his principles' to serve his clients.

17) ____ Counseling should be the primary function the counselor performs.

18) ____ The rehabilitation counselor does little counseling; he is a coordinator of services and does a little of everything.

19) ____ The counseling endeavor, on the average, is effective in bringing about positive behavior change in clients.

20) ____ Finding employment for a client should be a counselor's responsibility.

21) ____ Even though the counselor is employed as a bureaucratic functionary, he is a highly rated professional.

22) ____ The counselor is pretty much his own boss in planning his work.

23) ____ Being a rehabilitation counselor is intellectually stimulating.

24) ____ In order to consider himself a truly professional person, the counselor should have a master's degree.

25) ____ Rehabilitation counselor education prepares the employee to function more effectivelly within the state agency.

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